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D.C. Appeals Court Chief Judge Lays Out Third Term Plans



Addressing an audience of mostly his peers from the bench, District of Columbia Court of Appeals Chief Judge Eric Washington pledged yesterday to continue efforts to reduce the time it takes the city's highest court to resolve cases.

Washington appeared yesterday afternoon at a public forum to answer questions about his plans for a third term as chief of the court. The judge is unopposed in his bid for another four-year term. Washington, speaking in the main courtroom of the appeals court, cited statistics showing the court had made strides in speeding up the disposition of cases. Still, he acknowledged, "there's more we can do."

According to court data, the appeals court took a median time of 352 days to resolve cases, marking the first time in a decade that number dropped below the one-year line. Washington warned there would always be cases that will take longer to resolve, however, noting the court didn't want to take a "cookie-cutter" approach.

The District of Columbia Judicial Nomination Commission—a seven-person body with members appointed by the White House, mayor, D.C. Council, D.C. Bar and U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia—will decide whether to reappoint Washington. The commission organized last night's event.

Washington said his other priorities in his next term would be to continue efforts to offer more training opportunities for court staff and make sure employees were coordinating efficiently between the appeals court and the District of Columbia Superior Court.

He lamented the lack of progress he had made so far in trying to work with the city's public school system on a civics education curriculum about the courts. Superior Court Chief Judge Lee Satterfield has spoken in the past about his frustration with school officials, who both judges say push back against proposals beyond one-day special events featuring judges.

U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan, chair of the nomination commission, praised a new program run by the appeals court in recent years to hold oral arguments at area law schools. Washington said he was pleased by the positive response from the schools and also the general public, which is invited to attend.

Washington's current term as chief judge expires in August. He has been on the appellate bench since 1999, and previously served for four years as a Superior Court judge.

National Law Journal photo by Zoe Tillman. Above, Chief Judge Eric Washington speaks at the June 5 public forum.

Posted by Zoe Tillman on June 06, 2013 at 11:35 AM